

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2390

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652 XGDS-2

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJ: LEADING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

1. WIDER FIELD OF CANDIDATES HAS NARROWED DOWN TO TWO TOP ONES AS BEST WE CAN FIGURE OUT: ELIAS SARKIS AND RAYMOND EDDE. SARKIS IS GOVERNOR OF CENTRAL BANK, A MAN WITH BROAD INTELLECTUAL INTERESTS BUT NOT MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND WITHOUT A PERSONAL POLITICALPBASE. HE WAS PUSHED BY CHEHABIST FORCES HERE AS OPPONENT TO FRANGIE IN THE LAST ELECTION AND LOST BY ONE VOTE. HE IS MIDDLE OF THE ROAD FISCAL CONSERVATIVE, LIBERAL ON SOCIAL REFORM, BUT SOMEWHAT LACKING IN OUTWARD GLAMOUR. HE IS THE SYRIAN CANDIDATE AT PRESENT AND WOULD BE EMINENTLY ACCEPTABLE TO RIGHT WING CHRISTAIN PHALANGE, AS WELL AS FRANGIE. HE WOULD ALSO BENEFIT FROM CHEHABIST SENTIMENTS IN LEBANESE ARMY. SARKIS WOULD BE AN EXCEPTIONALLY

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COOPERATIVE PRESIDENT FROM USG POINT OF VIEW TOO. OUR

ONLY FEAR IS THAT HE MAY HAVE BEEN IRREMEDIABLY TARRED BY THE SYRIAN BRUSH AND BE UNACCEPTABLE TO MANY LEBANESE PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR THAT REASON ALONE.

2. RAYMOND EDDE IS A LEADING MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND SON OF PREVIOUS PRESIDENT OF LEBANON. WHILE BASICALLY ALSO MIDDLE OF THE ROAD AND CONSERVATIVE, HE FAVORS SOCIO-ECONOMIC REFORM AND WANTS TO GET RELIGION OUT OF POLITICS AND THE ARMY. HE IS SUPPORTED BY BROAD LEFT WING SPECTRUM AS WELL AS CONSERVATIVE MOSLEM OPINION. HIS PROBLEM HAS BEEN OPPOSITION OF THE RIGHT WING, WHICH INCLUDES MOST LEADING CHRISTIAN POLITICANS. MORE RECENTLY, HIS OUTSPOKEN REMARKS AGAINST THE SYRIAN INITIATIVE HERE (INCLUDING A REMARK QUOTED BY THE PRESS WHICH IMPLIED SYRIAN COLLUSION WITH ISRAEL) APPEARS TO HAVE MADE HIM "UNACCEPTABLE" TO SYRIANS. IN FACT, HIS BARBED REMARKS ARE EDDE'S PRIMARY POLITICAL LIABILITY, HAVING EARNED HIM MANY FOES OVER HIS LONG POLITICAL LIFE. YET EDDE PROBABLY WOULD ENJOY CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT AMONG THE TWO-THIRDS OF PARLIAMENTARY DEPUTIES WHO SIGNED PETITION TO OUST FRANGIE. HIS PRESENT STRATEGY IS TO DENY BEING A CANDIDATE OF THE LEFT SO THAT HE MAY GATHER A BIT OF ACCEPTABILITY FROM THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT. HE PRESUMABLY IS HOPING SOMEHOW TO COVERCOME SYRIAN OBJECTIONS, PROBABLY BY SEEKING TO EXCLUDE SYRIANS FROM VOICE IN ELECTION OF NEXT PRESIDENT.

3. LEFTIST STRATEGY BEING COORDINATED BY JUMBLATT HAS BEEN TO PUSH ANOTHER TRADITIONAL JUMBLATTIST CANDIDATE, PIERRE HELOU. HELOU (A COUSIN OF FORMER PRESIDENT CHARLES HELOU) IS A BRIGHT, PERSONABLE MARONITE WITH SOMEWHAT DANDYISH WESTERN MANNERS, WHO IS FREQUENTLY OUT OF THE COUNTRY AND HAS NO PERSONAL POLITICAL BASE. WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE HE COULD BE ELECTED PRESIDENT UNLESS THERE WAS A FINAL STANDOFF BETWEEN SARKIS AND EDDE AND DARK HORSES WERE BEING CONSIDERED. HELOU'S CHIEF APPEAL IS IN HIS PROBABLY WEAKNESS, ALLOWING BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT TO BELIEVE HE CAN BE MANIPULATED.

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4. SHOULD STANDOFF BE REACHED (PERHAPS THROUGH AN ABSOLUTE SYRIAN VETO OF EDDE, COUPLED WITH ABSENCE OF PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY FOR SARKIS), WE SUSPECT OTHER CANDIDATES WILL BE FOUND AND PUT FORWARD. ONE OF THESE MIGHT BE JEAN AZIZ, A REGIONAL POLITICAN FROM THE SOUTH, WHO IS ON GOOD TERMS WITH PALESTINIANS, DRUZE AND MOSLEMS THERE. HE IS NUMBER TWO OR THREE ON THE LISTS OF MANY TOP POLITICAL LEADERS BUT IS NOT

CONSIDERED AMONG THE LEADING CONTENDERS AT THE MOMENT. RAYMOND EDDE'S BROTHER PIERRE IS ANOTHER POSSIBLE DARK HORSE, BENEFITING FROM THE EDDE NAME BUT NOT BURDENED BY RAYMOND'S ENEMIES. MICHEL KHOURY (SON OF ANOTHER FORMER PRESIDENT) IS ANOTHER POSSIBILITY. SO MIGHT A MILITARY MAN EMERGE (BASED ON THE PRECEDENT OF GENERAL CHEHAB).

5. THE ONE MAN WE ARE QUITE SURE COULD NEVER BE REELECTED PRESIDENT IS CAMILLE CHAMOUN. HE IS NEVERTHELESS REPORTED TO BE AN ENERGETIC EXPONENT OF HIS OWN CANDIDACY AND MAY SERVE THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT AS A STALKING-HORSE CANDIDATE WHILE THE HEAVY BARGAINING TAKES PLACE.

6. USG POLICY REMAINS TO TAKE NO SIDES ON THIS ISSUE. WE CAN LIVE WITH ANY CANDIDATE ELECTED BY DUE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS. THE ISSUES ARE IN ANY CASE LARGER THAN THE MEN AND WILL HAVE TO BE FACED IN VERY SIMILAR WAYS BY ANY NEXT PRESIDENT. THE POLITICIANS WILL TRY POLITICAL SOLUTIONS, WHILE A MILITARY MAN (IN ANY CASE A LONG SHOT) WOULD PROBABLY TRY TO REBUILD THE LEBANESE ARMY AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE INTO AN INSTRUMENT FOR LEBANESE COHESION. OUR ONLY COMMENT ALONG THAT LINE WOULD BE THAT A RELATIVELY STRONGER PRESIDENT (SARKIS OR EDDE) WOULD STAND A BETTER CHANCE OF STABILIZING LEBANON AND CREATING A STRONG REGIME, WHICH WOULD REMOVE SOME OF THE PRESENT REASONS OR PRETEXTS FOR OUTSIDE INTERVENTIONS BY ITS NEIGHBORS AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES. SUCH A LEBANON WOULD ALSO FACILITATE USG POLICY OF NON-INVOLVEMENT.
LAMBRAKIS

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